

The Real Precursors of Luther.

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tions. How far Wicklif carried the attack on tradition we have already noted. The attack proved, as we have seen, premature. His English followers, the Lollards, were crushed by the decrees of a reactionary, persecuting Parliament. But, while the Lollards effected but a temporary and comparatively insignificant revolt in England, the Hussites produced a revolution which powerfully affected the age in which Luther appeared. Wicklif and Hus are the real precursors of Luther in their policy of breaking rather than mending what it was hopeless to try to repair. It was the age of religious reaction, to which these men had contributed so mighty an impulse, that produced Martin Luther. Without Wicklif and Hus, Luther might have been possible, for the Wittenberg reformer did not directly imbibe his reforming zeal or his theology from the theologian of Oxford or the martyr of Constance. The martyr of Constance was in truth too conservative in doctrine to be the father of the revolution launched from Wittenberg or Geneva. But without the age which produced a Wicklif or a Hus, and which these men in their turn helped to nurture, Luther would merely have proved one more martyr of priestly intolerance. We have heard much of the influence of great men, of " the heroes " of history to whom the progress of the world has been ascribed by Mr Carlyle and his disciples. Great men have undoubtedly achieved much that is " heroic," much for which humanity ought to be thankful. But, after all, it is usually the age that makes the man. This is particularly true of Luther. Revolutions are not made ; they are developed, and a long process of attack and failure, of aggression and repression, of suffering and martyrdom, went to the development of the Lutheran Reformation.

I have said that the Reformation was a complex move
ment, both in its factors and its effects. Its
factors were not
merely religious, they were intellectual, political,
social, even
economic as well. We have already seen their
operation,
more or less, in the great reactionary and
revolutionary move
ments of the fifteenth century. They come into
even greater
prominence in the movement led by Luther. No
greater

mistake, then, than to regard the movement to
which Luther
gave such an impulse as purely religious. True,
there is a
danger of underrating as well as overrating
the factor of
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